

Sunday Times

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VACCINATION.

The occurrence of a small-pox epidemic in London has naturally turned public attention to the question of vaccination and to its efficiency as a prophylactic against the disease. It has also induced a large number among the more educated classes to be re-vaccinated. At the same time it has aroused the more vigorous champions of anti-vaccination into a somewhat violent activity. Our contemporary, the *Star*, has been particularly prominent and prematurely jubilant in its outcries against vaccination. Associated with this campaign of anti-vaccination are doubtless many who do not sufficiently heed the sage reflection, that often angels fear to tread where more venturesome spirits rush in without due deliberation. In the interests of the deeper truth there are always two precautions which should be heeded in dealing with questions of great public moment. The first is to clear our minds of all prejudice and falsely conceived pride, and the second to make sure that the wise adage "a little knowledge is dangerous" is not forgotten. It is pathetic to observe how keenly our ultra-Radical contemporary is suddenly solicitous of the

"liberty of the subject," considering that most of its political life has been spent in advocating those very panaceas that jeopardise and restrict individual liberty to an extent hardly equalled under the decrees of the most despotic of English Kings. In so far as our contemporary in its advocacy against vaccination appeals for the maintenance of personal freedom our sympathies are with it. But when it contends that vaccination is not effectual to a greater or less extent in protecting individuals against attacks of small-pox, it is not merely entering upon a debateable matter, but it is assuming an untenable position. For its fundamental premiss, upon which the whole of its campaign is based, is not only invalid, but has no justification of any kind.

Our contemporary has, both specifically and impliedly, made the erroneous assumption that medical men assert vaccination to be an *absolute* protection against small-pox and that one inoculation is capable of protecting for the whole length of life. Such a contention has never been made by the medical profession in its corporate capacity nor by medical men individually who have made the subject a special study. Had the *Star* turned to the Report of the Vaccination Commission which sat from 1889 to 1896 and made a most exhaustive inquiry into the matter, it would have found the following claims only were made for the efficiency of vaccination as a prophylaxis against smallpox: Vaccination *diminishes the liability* to be attacked by the disease; it modifies the character of the disease and renders it less fatal and of a milder type; the protection it affords against attacks of the disease is greatest during the years immediately succeeding the operation of vaccination; after the lapse of the period of highest




protective potency, the efficacy of vaccination to protect against attack rapidly diminishes, but it is still considerable even at the end of fifteen years, and possibly never altogether ceases; its power to modify the disease does not diminish as rapidly as its protective influence against disease, and its efficacy, during the latter periods of life, to modify the disease is still very considerable; re-vaccination restores the protection which lapse of time has diminished, but the evidence shows that this protection again diminishes, and that, to ensure the highest degree of protection which vaccination can give the operation should be repeated at intervals of nine or ten years; and, finally, the beneficial effects of vaccination are most experienced by those in whose case it has been most thorough, as evidenced by the total area and number of the inoculation marks.

In view of these most authoritative pronouncements, the thirty uninvestigated cases picked out by our contemporary with great eagerness, but we doubt if with equal discrimination, of "vaccinated" persons who have contracted small-pox during the present epidemic, have therefore no value whatever as an argument against the real claims made on behalf of vaccination. For the case, as stated by the *Star*, is neither apparently actuated by the scientific spirit nor manifests the slightest logical consistency. And when in bold headlines it announces that "Small-pox is less dangerous than vaccination" it is making a perfectly unjustifiable statement, possibly fraught with the gravest consequences to the community and with not a single fact to support it. For the truth is, when modern vaccination is performed with due regard to cleanliness and glycerinated calf-lymph is used, there is practically no danger. But if people are dirty and care-



less in their personal habits, complications may arise, whether the skin abrasion has been produced by the vaccine needle or by the ordinary accidents of life. But that is not the fault of vaccination. It is a risk which every unclean person incurs every day of his life. As to the dangers and loathsomeness of small-pox our contemporary must have forgotten history. It was Lord Macaulay who concisely described these dangers when he wrote: "The small-pox was always present, filling the churchyards with corpses, tormenting with constant fears all whom it had not yet stricken, leaving on those whose lives it spared the hideous traces of its power, turning the baby into a changeling at which the mother shuddered, and making the eyes and cheeks of the betrothed maiden objects of horror to the lover." The universal prevalence of this hideous disease in pre-vaccination times was also expressed in the old-time aphorism "From small-pox and love few remain free." Before the days of vaccination, children contracted small-pox even more frequently than they now acquire measles, and were disfigured and in many cases also maimed for life. The extent of such secondary consequences may be gauged from the fact that, before the introduction of compulsory vaccination, fully two-thirds of the persons who sought relief at the Hospital for the Indigent Blind were blind as the result of small-pox. In the bazaars of India 90 per cent. of the cases of blindness met with were due to the same cause. In the epidemic in France in 1871, in addition to 60,000 deaths from small-pox, there were 24,000 cases of permanent disability and disfiguration. These are but a few of the facts that can be mentioned and, in face of them,



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it is, it seems to us, a clear disregard of a serious journalistic responsibility to proclaim the unjustifiably erroneous statement that "small-pox is less dangerous than vaccination." Whenever has modern vaccination committed such hideous and life-long ravages as those we have just described?

So far as the efficacy of vaccination in minimising and protecting against small-pox is concerned the facts are clear and cogent. No more instructive instance can be found than that provided by the Franco-Prussian War. In the German Army there were over a million men who had been compulsorily vaccinated and re-vaccinated. In the French Army there was a less number of men, most of whom had not been vaccinated. Small-pox was introduced into the army of France by some recruits from Breton, and 23,400 men were lost to the service of their country in consequence. In the German Army only 226 men died of small-pox. Before a fact like this the few unanalysed and sporadic instances so jubilantly proclaimed by the *Star* sink into their proper degree of insignificance and meaninglessness.

The proper conception of the nature of these problems needs considerably more per-lustration than our contemporary appears to have conferred upon them. They cannot be adequately dealt with nor justice done to truth by a few hurried extracts culled from a recent and therefore necessarily imperfect report. These questions need a wide survey. In pre-vaccination times, during the ninety-seven years extending from 1660 to 1757, the annual death rate from small-pox was 4,220 per million of the population. From 1771 to 1780 it was 5,000 per million of the population. In 1871 systematic arrangements were made for the enforcement of compulsory vac-

ination, and from 1872 to 1882 the death rate fell to 262 per million of the population! Will our contemporary endeavour to answer that fact? At the same time it may like to make an attempt to answer the further fact that in Germany and other countries, where vaccination and re-vaccination are both compulsory, small-pox is practically unknown.

But we may pass to another line of investigation. In the Sheffield epidemic of 1887-88 it was found that only five children under ten years of age per thousand vaccinated cases contracted the disease. And, among those the death rate was .0 per cent. Whereas among the unvaccinated the incidence of the disease was 101 per thousand and their death rate 44 per cent. ! So far as people over ten years of age were concerned it was ascertained that only 3 per 1,000 of people who had been twice vaccinated contracted the disease and their death rate was only .08 per cent. Among those once vaccinated 19 per 1,000 acquired the disease and their death rate was 1 per cent. In unvaccinated cases, 94 per 1,000 were inflicted with small-pox and the death rate was 51 per cent. In other words, these figures show that for every 100,000 persons twice vaccinated only eight will die, whereas in an equal number of unvaccinated persons 5,100 will die! This is a complete refutation of the attitude adopted by our contemporary. What is true of communities is equally so of the members of a family. The vaccinated enjoy immunity or else escape with a very mild form of the disease, developing only one or two skin pustules, and recovering without any permanent injury, while the unvaccinated die or are disfigured, maimed, or blinded for life.

In dealing with the exceptional cases where



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vaccinated persons acquire the disease several considerations enter into the question. In the first place, the vaccine used may not have been potent enough. A certain amount of the material used in private practice is bad in quality and some of it is known by the makers—mostly French—to be so impotent that croton oil is added to it in order to blister the skin and to thereby create the appearance of the vaccine “having taken.” Obviously such cases cannot be accepted as successful vaccinations, or even as vaccinations at all. In the second place, some few persons are so extremely and constitutionally susceptible to small-pox that even a successful vaccination cannot protect them. On the other hand, some are so constitutionally immune that they never acquire the disease, though they may come in contact with it. That is the explanation of the case of Bob Spicer, described by Dr. Hadwen in the *Star*. But it does not in any way justify that gentleman’s implied conclusions. Such immune individuals may or may not be numerous in the community. It is quite probable that a not insignificant percentage of people are constitutionally immune, but the devastation of the Sheffield outbreak of recent years should warn us that a yet larger percentage is undoubtedly susceptible and that its best chances of safety lie in a wise voluntary vaccination and re-vaccination.

DIAGRAM OF SMALL-POX EPIDEMIC IN SHEFFIELD IN 1887-88.

